### 1NC—Offense

#### Decline inevitable --- China passes the US and creates their own international order --- the US could go peacefully, ushering in multipolarity, but expansionist military spending emboldens hawks to dig their heels in, causing great power war

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The fate of international orders is closely linked to power transition dynamics. Throughout modern international history the prevailing international order has reflected the balance of power that existed at the time of its creation. When that balance changes sufficiently, the old order will be replaced by a new one. Viewed from this perspective, what are the Pax Americana’s prospects? How will China’s rise, and America’s decline, affect the international order in the years ahead? The surprising answer given by top US security studies scholars is: ‘Not much.’ The United States, so the argument goes, can ‘lock in’ the Pax Americana’s essential features, including its rules, norms and institutions.65 John Ikenberry, Stephen Brooks and William Wohlforth are the leading proponents of the lock-in thesis. Ikenberry was the first to set out the concept, arguing in After victory that a hegemon, by building an institutionalized, rules-based international order, ‘can lock-in favorable arrangements that continue beyond the zenith of its power’.66 In other words, the international order can remain intact even after the hegemonic power that created it has lost its pre-eminent position in the international political system. On this point, Ikenberry echoes Robert Keohane’s argument in After hegemony that, once a liberal international order has been established by a hegemonic power, if the hegemon declines it is possible for a small group of Great Powers to take the place of the former hegemon and collectively manage the international system.67 That is, under certain conditions ‘hegemonic stability’ can exist even if there is no hegemonic power. In Liberal Leviathan, Ikenberry built on this logic to argue that, even if the Pax Americana were to wither completely, the LRBIO would nevertheless survive. As Ikenberry put it: ‘America’s position in the global system may decline but the international order it leads can remain the dominating logic of the twenty-first century.’68 Ikenberry’s view seems to have evolved, however. In jointly authored articles in International Security and Foreign Affairs, Brooks, Ikenberry and Wohlforth embrace hegemonic stability theory.69 That is, they contend that, like all international orders, the post-1945 international order does, in fact, require a hegemonic power to maintain it—and not just any hegemon, but the United States. The logic of their argument is that the LRBIO and the Pax Americana are one and the same, and that US pre-eminence is a necessary condition for the LRBIO. According to them, the United States must exercise ‘global leadership’—the US foreign policy establishment’s code phrase for hegemony—by acting as a security provider and geopolitical stabilizer; by maintaining an open, liberal international economy; and by promoting global cooperation through upholding and revising the post-1945 liberal order—which is both ‘institutional and normative’—created by the Pax Americana.70 They also claim that the post-1945 Pax Americana ‘allows the United States to … wrap its hegemonic rule in a rules-based order’.71 This helps to conceal the actual motives of self-interest and realpolitik that underlie American hegemony. Read together, the International Security and Foreign Affairs articles by Brooks, Ikenberry and Wohlforth make clear the authors’ view that the post-1945 LRBIO is inextricably linked to US hegemony; that is, to the Pax Americana. This is in keeping with the common understanding of hegemonic stability theory. As they see it, the post-1945 international order based on American pre-eminence ‘has served the US well for the past six decades and there is no reason to give it up now’.72 The argument has special force given that, according to the— correct—logic of their argument (and of hegemonic stability theory), if American hegemony goes, the LRBIO goes with it. In their preference for maintaining the post-1945 hegemonic American international order, Brooks, Ikenberry and Wohlforth echo the renowned late nineteenthcentury British statesman Lord Salisbury. Presiding over a hegemonic Britain that was already perceptibly declining, he famously said: ‘Whatever happens will be for the worse. Therefore, it is in our interest that as little should happen as possible.’ The post-1945 international order is (or was) a concrete manifestation of America’s hegemonic status. So, of course, the US foreign policy establishment wants as little change as possible in international politics. Why would it wish otherwise, when change would inevitably be both the cause and effect of diminishing American power and influence? The United States has every incentive for wanting to prolong the post-1945 international order. After all, for most of the last 70 years or so, the US has occupied the geopolitical penthouse (‘when America ruled the world’). From that lofty height, however, the only direction it can go is down. The lock-in strategy is seductive because it holds out (or appears to hold out) the possibility that the United States can preserve the status quo—the post-1945 international order—even as the geopolitical status quo of American hegemony is changing. Lock-in is attractive—superficially—because it assumes that China’s rise will not effect a major change in the international system. Specifically, lock-in holds that China’s rise can be managed by integrating it into the post-1945 international order, and ensuring that the exercise of Chinese power takes place within that order’s rules and institutions.73 By doing so, it is claimed, the United States can offset its declining power and ‘ensure the international order it leads can remain the dominating logic of the twenty-first century’.74 Lock-in assumes that China has no interest in overturning—or significantly modifying—the post-1945 international order in which it rose and became wealthy. Certainly, China did rise within the Pax Americana’s LRBIO. However, China did not rise to preserve that American-dominated order. For some three decades (beginning with Deng Xiaoping’s economic reforms) China took a low profile in international politics, and avoided confrontation both with the United States and with its regional neighbours. Integration into the open international economy spurred China’s rapid growth. China’s self-described ‘peaceful rise’ followed the script written by Deng Xiaoping: ‘Lie low. Hide your capabilities. Bide your time.’ However, the fact that China bandwagoned with the United States in joining the international economic order did not mean that its longer-term intention was—or is—to preserve the post-1945 international order. In joining the liberal economic order, Beijing’s goal was not simply to get rich; by integrating itself into the post-1945 international order, China was able to avoid conflict with the United States until it became wealthy enough to acquire the military capabilities necessary to compete with America for regional hegemony in east Asia.75 Judging from Xi Jinping’s policy pronouncements, China’s days of biding its time and hiding its capabilities are over. Lock-in proponents argue that even as the Sino-American military and economic balance continues to tilt increasingly in Beijing’s favour, the post-1945 international order’s rules, institutions and norms will offset America’s loss of hard power. There is historical evidence that suggests this is wishful thinking. Take the case of Britain after the Second World War. Despite the dramatic weakening of Britain’s economic and financial clout caused by its efforts in the two world wars, after 1945 British leaders believed that the United Kingdom could remain one of three major world powers. In pursuit of this goal, they formulated their own version of lock-in. As the historian John Darwin puts it, officials in London thought that by transforming the Commonwealth, Britain could transition ‘from an empire of rule to an empire of influence’.76 Specifically, they believed that ‘free from the authoritarian, acquisitive and exploitative traditions of the old version of empire’, the reconfigured Commonwealth ‘would make the British connection voluntary, democratic, and mutually beneficial’.77 The reformed Commonwealth therefore would serve as the institutional instrument of continuing British world power, within which shared values and norms would bind Britain’s former colonies and dominions to London’s leadership.78 The reasons why British policy makers bought into this vision sound an awful lot like the reasons why the presentday American proponents of lock-in think it will preserve the United States’ global leadership even as its hard power erodes. Lock-in did not work for Britain following the Second World War, and there is scant reason to think it will work for the United States in the coming years of the twenty-first century. The lock-in strategy also assumes that if the Pax Americana’s institutions are reformed, Beijing (and other non-western emerging powers) will find it more attractive to remain in the post-1945 international order than to overturn it. That assumption, however, is logically flawed: achieving lock-in by reforming the existing international order presumes that the United States can have its cake (preserving the Pax Americana) and eat it too (reforming the current international system’s legacy institutions). But, as we all know, when the cake is eaten, it’s gone. Reform—at least, any kind of reform that would appeal to China—would mean the United States yielding significant power in international institutions to accommodate Beijing. However, doing so would reduce US ability to shape outcomes, diminish Washington’s voice in international institutions, and impose constraints on US autonomy in foreign and domestic policy.79 As University of Birmingham lecturer Sevasti-Eleni Vezirgiannidou observes with respect to institutional reform: ‘It is questionable whether this will really preserve US influence or rather, on the contrary, diminish it, as the United States will have to share power in a reformed order and thus will be restricted in its ability to act unilaterally.’80 The US foreign policy establishment may talk the talk of reforming the international order (and the institutions that underpin it), but it is doubtful it will walk the walk with respect to reform, because that would mean accepting a downsized American role in international politics. On the contrary, Washington’s opposition to the AIIB indicates that the United States is not prepared to see its influence in the international order diminished. And, with respect to reforming the post-1945 international order to accommodate the reality of a risen China, this is the nub of the problem: instead of preserving the Pax Americana, reform would lead to changes in the international order that would undermine it. Of course, regardless of whether there is institutional reform, the coming decades are likely to witness major changes in the international order irrespective of America’s preferences. What will happen to the international order as China continues to rise, and America’s relative power continues to decline? As Yogi Berra, the greatest of all American philosophers (immortalized in baseball’s Hall of Fame), said: ‘Making predictions is hard. Especially about the future.’ However, one thing seems pretty certain: China is not on the verge of either of ruling the world, or becoming a global hegemon comparable to the United States after the Second World War; not yet, anyway. Thus, for the next several decades (at least) it will be neither China’s world nor America’s: international leadership will be contested.81 During this period, China can be expected to act pretty much as one would expect any Great Power to act while making the shift from rising to risen: it will use its newfound power to seek a much greater voice in managing—and shaping—the international order, and its underlying norms. For example, China will want others to acknowledge its ‘core interests’, including respect for its territorial integrity and its sovereignty. Beijing has expanded the geographic scope of its core interests beyond Tibet and Taiwan to include the South and East China Seas and Xinjiang. And, reflecting its insistence that states should refrain from intervening in others’ internal affairs, preservation of its political, economic and social systems also has been defined as a core interest.82 During the period of contested international leadership there is unlikely to be wholesale abandonment of the post-1945 international institutions. For example, as one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, Beijing is an acknowledged part of the Great Power club. Similarly, we should not expect to see a dramatic overhaul of the international economic system. As the world’s top-ranking exporter and trading state, China benefits hugely from economic openness. However, the state plays a much greater role in China’s economy than it does in the United States and Europe. Beijing will want rules that protect its semimercantilist economic policies and also ensure that its state-owned industries are not disadvantaged. Beijing will continue pressing for an even greater voice, both for itself and for the developing world, in institutions such as the IMF and World Bank (unless or until they are superseded by new ‘made in China’ institutions). In this respect, China will position itself as the developing world’s champion—a role for which it is well suited. Like many nations in the developing world— but unlike the United States—China has been a victim of western Great Power policies of imperialism and colonialism. As such, China has a claim to prominence in constructing a new international order that reflects the values of the developing world rather than those of the United States and the West.83 Even though the international economy will remain (more or less) open, in other respects the international system is likely to become much less liberal politically. The Chinese Communist Party’s 19th Congress demonstrated that China is not converging with the West: it is not going to become a democracy any time soon—if ever. Consequently, as China’s role in shaping the international agenda increases, democracy and human rights will become less salient. China will almost certainly try to change the norms that favour democracy promotion, ‘humani tarian’ intervention, human rights and the Responsibility to Protect. Beijing will resist norms that divide states into two camps, ranging democratic ‘good guys’ against non-democratic ‘bad guys’.84 Instead, it will offer its policy of ‘market authoritarianism’ to developing states as a better model of political, social and economic development than the US model based on the Washington Consensus. As its power continues to increase, China will seek to recast the world order in a way that not only advances its interests but also acknowledges both its enhanced power and its claims to status and prestige equal to those of the declining hegemon.85 For now, Beijing is (mostly) ‘working within the system’ to revise the post-1945 international order while simultaneously laying the groundwork for an alternative international order that eventually could displace the Pax Americana. As a 2007 report by the Center for a New American Security concluded: Rather than seeking to weaken or confront the United States directly, Chinese leaders are pursuing a subtle, multifaceted, long-term grand strategy that aims to derive as many benefits as possible from the existing international system while accumulating the economic wherewithal, military strength, and soft power resources to reinforce China’s emerging position as at least a regional great power.86 Even as it stays within the post-1945 international order, Beijing is not doing so to preserve it. In this sense, as Martin Jacques has observed, China is playing a double game. It is operating ‘both within and outside the existing international system while at the same time, in effect, sponsoring a new China-centric international system which will exist alongside the present system and probably slowly begin to usurp it’.87 The creation of the AIIB, which Beijing intends should ultimately eclipse the IMF and World Bank, is a good example of this strategy. American scholars and policy-makers believe that a lock-in strategy can be employed to head off any Chinese attempt to create a new international order, or to create a parallel order. They believe this because they have imbued the concept of a ‘rules-based, institutionalized, liberal international order’ with a talismanic quality. In so doing they have air-brushed Great Power politics out of the picture. As they see it, rules and institutions are politically neutral and, ipso facto, beneficial for all. Hence, they can be an effective substitute for declining hard power. However, rather than existing separately from the balance of power, rules, norms and institutions reflect it. Hence the world is no more likely to continue upholding the Pax Americana once US power declines than Britain’s dominions and former colonies were inclined to perpetuate the empire after the Second World War. The fate of the Pax Americana, and that of the international order, will be determined by the outcome of the Sino-American rivalry As the British scholar E. H. Carr observed, a rules-based international order ‘cannot be understood independently of the political foundation on which it rests and the political interests which it serves’.88 The post-Second World War international order is an American order that privileges US interests.89 Even the discourse of ‘liberal order’ cannot disguise this fact. Today, the ground is shifting beneath the Pax Americana’s foundations. Those who believe that lock-in can work view international politics as being, in essence, geopolitically antiseptic. For them, Great Power competition and conflict are transcended by international institutions, rules and norms. This is not how the real world works, however.90 Great Power politics is about power. Rules and institutions do not exist in a vacuum, hermetically sealed off from Great Power politics. Nor are they neutral. Rather, they reflect the distribution of power in the international system. In international politics, who rules makes the rules. In his classic study of international relations between the world wars, The Twenty years’ crisis, Carr analysed the political crisis of the 1930s caused by the breakdown of the post-First World War order symbolized by the Versailles Treaty.91 The Versailles system cracked, Carr argued, because of the widening gap between the order it represented and the actual distribution of power in Europe. Carr used the events of the 1930s to make a larger geopolitical point. International orders reflect the balance of power that exists at time of their creation. Over time, however, the relative power of states changes, and eventually the international order no longer reflects the actual distribution of power between or among the leading Great Powers. When that happens, the legitimacy of the prevailing order is called into question, and it will be challenged by the rising power(s). When the balance of power swings—or is perceived to swing—in its direction, a rising power becomes increasingly dissatisfied with the international order, and seeks to revise it. The challenger wants to change the rules embodied in the existing international order—rules written, of course, by the once dominant but now declining Great Power that created it. It also wants the allocation of prestige and status changed to reflect its newly acquired power. The incumbent hegemon, of course, wants to preserve the existing international order as is—an order that it midwifed to advance, and consolidate, its own interests. The E. H. Carr Moment presents the incumbent hegemon with a choice. It can dig in its heels and try to preserve the prevailing order—and its privileged position therein; or it can accede to the rising challenger’s demands for revision. If it chooses the former course of action, it runs the risk of war with the dissatisfied challenger. If it chooses the latter, it must come to terms with the reality of its decline, and the end of its hegemonic position. The E. H. Carr Moment is where the geopolitical rubber meets the road: the status quo power(s) must choose between accommodating or opposing the revisionist demands of the rising power(s). Liberal internationalists such as John Ikenberry argue that China will not challenge the current international order, even as the distribution of power continues to shift in its favour. This is a doubtful proposition. The geopolitical question—the E. H. Carr Moment—of our time is whether the declining hegemon in east Asia, the United States, will try to preserve a status quo that is becoming increasingly out of sync with the shifting distribution of power, or whether it can reconcile itself to a rising China’s revisionist demands that the international order in east Asia be realigned to reflect the emerging power realities. Unless the United States can adjust gracefully to this tectonic geopolitical shift, the chances of a Sino-American war are high—as they always are during power transitions.92 However, whether change comes peacefully or violently, the Pax Americana’s days are numbered.

#### The risk of entrapment for the US is very high – aff evidence will rely on Cold War data or flawed methodology that mis defines entrapment

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In this chapter, building on the foundational work of Jack Snyder and Thomas J. Christensen (Snyder 1984; Christensen and Snyder 1990), we contend that the risks of entrapment for the contemporary United States are significant. More specifically, we make two arguments. First, much of the entrapment debate thus far has been a game of shadow boxing. As elaborated below, current efforts to study the frequency and risks of entrapment have virtually defined the problem away by treating entrapment as solely occurring when one ally goes to war for the sake of a partner when the first ally would prefer to avoid conflict. Although this is indeed the most concerning form of entrapment, it misses that entrapment does not necessarily manifest in an either/ or choice in which a state clearly takes a step it avowedly prefers to avoid. Instead, entrapment can also manifest in critical decisions states make when confronting an adversary that involve the timing of confrontation, the relative resources contributed to the effort, and the objectives involved. These different decisions on the road to deterrence and reassurance - and war - are crucial, as they help explain why states can be entrapped even if they agree that confronting an opponent is generally in their "national interest."

Second, all forms of entrapment are more likely to occur in today's unipolar world, and to be especially prevalent if and when unipolarity begins to wane. This is significant because evidence that entrapment is uncommon - and thus current US grand strategy sustainable - has almost exclusively been drawn from the bipolar world of the Cold War. Yet, because the two great powers in bipolar systems do not need allies to establish a workable balance, the Cold War is among the least likely of all situations for entrapment to occur (Waltz 1979).

Instead, alliances in multipolar and unipolar systems are likely to carry greater entrapment risks. Multipolar entrapment is easily understood (and much studied) - needing allies for a workable balance of power, states are entrapped into costly foreign adventures out of fears of being isolated and left strategically vulnerable. Studies of Europe's pre-World War I system make this point (Snyder 1984: 471-483; Schroeder 1972; Van Evera 1984: 96--101). Unipolarity, on the other hand, is less determinant but, on balance, we argue that it generates entrapment risks falling between unipolar and bipolar systems. Here, and although unipolarity limits a great power's need for allies for balance-of-power reasons, it reifies the need for allies to forestall the emergence of new great powers. In the process, unipolar alliances make moral hazard - the tendency for allies to adopt progressively riskier policies in contravention of the formal or informal terms of an alliance with a Stronger actor- particularly likely (Kuperman 2008). Unipolar alliances thus carry real entrapment risks, as a hegemon may need to go to war for allies to sustain its current dominance in the international system. The net result, therefore, is a situation where the United States' large power advantages over allies and prospective rivals may make it especially vulnerable to entrapment.

Together, these dynamics bolster the case for a more restrained US grand strategy and help undercut a key prop used by those advocating for primacist or "deep engagement" strategies. Alliances are not a free lunch for the United States. Although the United States' alliances may be good for many things, helping the United States avoid conflicts is not one of them. Alliances carry greater entrapment risks than often appreciated. Ultimately, even if some crises are deterred or foreclosed, the process of doing so creates new potential conflicts.

#### Fear of lost credibility incentivizes US entrapment – it’s fueling aggression towards China which risks great power war in East Asia.

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Since its 2010- 2011 announcement, the pivot has inserted the United States into a host of Asian political and military disputes with China involving ownership of contested maritime space and islands in the South and East China Seas. Though there may be economic resources beneath the surface around some of these locales, neither the United States nor its allies have an intrinsic interest in ownership of contested areas. Instead, the contested maritime domains are worrisome to US allies for what they suggest about China's territorial ambitions. They are therefore important to the United States for the signal American actions send to allies over American credibility. Thus, the United States has moved to back its allies in their disputes with the PRC by rhetorically portraying China as the principal aggressor, clarifying that US commitments to the allies would cover the maritime areas under dispute, and - above all - has dispatched its own military forces to enforce what the US and its allies define as the "status quo" in contravention of China's own interests (Russell 2014; White House 2014; US Pacific Command 2015;Valencia 2016; LaGrone 2015; Panda 2016).Whatever the legitimacy of these actions, their effect is to create a self-perpetuating cycle: the more the United States stands by its allies in opposing potential Chinese ambitions, the nominally more credible the American resolve to defend its allies, the more the allies are inclined to act aggressively toward China, and the greater the likelihood of a direct US- Chinese confron\*tation. In other words, treating American support for its allies as a litmus test of the alliances themselves requires the United States to take steps on behalf of its allies that risk conflict with China.

This is entrapment of the purest sort. The United States could readily provide security to its friends in East Asia, maintain Asia's political status quo, or more generally limit the rise of China without involving itself in Asian maritime disputes. To the extent that the United States simply wants to preserve East Asian stability, it could negotiate directly with the P.R.C. to settle conflicts of interest on a bilateral basis. To the extent that the United States wants to prevent China from becoming an Asian hegemon or engaging in military action beyond its borders, it could simply surge forces to the region as crises develop or build up the military forces of its clients (Itzkowitz Shifrinson and Lalwani 2014; Glaser 2015; Mirski 2013). That these options are treated as insufficient suggests entrapment at play. Even if protecting Japan, South Korea, and other regional partners is in the United States' interest, only entrapment explains the timing and form of the American response.3

#### Expanded US influence leads to the US hijacking North Korea denuclearization deals --- causes failure --- history proves

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America's voluntary assumption of leading roles also may have unintentionally hindered the solution of major international problems. The North Korean nuclear development may be a case in point. Since Pyongyang's nuclear program became an international issue in the late 1980s, Washington has willingly taken up the principal responsibility of resolving the matter. It was the United States that single-handedly negotiated and signed the 1994 Framework Agreement with North Korea in Geneva. When the arrangement failed to surmount mutual distrust and collapsed a decade later, Washington began to play a leading role again in the search for a replacement, although other members of the Six-Party Talks played significant supporting roles as well. Its multilateral appearance notwithstanding, the joint statement of September 19, 2005 essentially had two primary contracting parties - North Korea and the United States; so did two follow-up plans for implementation concluded on February 13 and October 3, 2007. Unfortunately, these Washington-led initiatives have failed, by inadvertently setting the process of North Korean denuclearization on a particularly difficult path. All these agreements required close cooperation between two adversaries with a long history of acute conflict and deep mistrust. Among all participants of the Six-Party Talks, the United States overall had the most inimical relationship with North Korea. (Over the period when the participants negotiated and concluded those multilateral agreements, inter-Korean relations were not so confrontational, as Seoul pursued a policy of unconditional engagement and accordingly tolerated Pyongyang's unilateral actions.) Therefore, it was especially difficult for Pyongyang to trust Washington's promises on economic assistance and security guarantee; Washington for its own part found Pyongyang's commitments to denuclearization untrustworthy. Such mutual distrust eventually wrecked the series of agreements designed to stop Pyongyang's nuclear development. The distrustful Pyongyang pursued a secret Plan B (uranium enrichment) to hedge against possible US perfidy. The equally doubting Washington put on hold, or brought to a halt, the implementation of the nuclear deals at the first sign of Pyongyang's apparent noncompliance.7 Had some other country with lesser mistrust - such as China in its capacity as North Korea's ally - taken charge of striking and implementing a deal with North Korea, the denuclearization process might have had a better prospect for success, as was the case with South Korea. Seoul gave up nuclear development in the late 1970s in exchange for security guarantees and under economic pressures not from its communist adversaries, but from its American ally (Monteiro and Debs, 2014). This formula owed its success in part to the general tendency that sanctions and inducements offered by an ally are more effective than those by an adversary: allies tend to possess more credibility and leverage than do adversaries (Drezner, 1999).8 Had Moscow or Beijing similarly taken the lead in persuading Seoul to denuclearize, success would have been far less likely because of the deep-seated mistrust between them. These US-led nuclear deals proved to be not only ineffectual but also counterproductive. Their breakdowns further deepened the mutual distrust between Washington and Pyongyang, as each felt cheated by the other. Expressing this sense of betrayal, the then US Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates stated in 2009 "I'm tired of buying the same horse twice," as the Six-Party Talks slipped into indefinite suspension as the result of Pyongyang's second nuclear test and its international repercussions (Sanger, 2009). One of the former President Obama's chief strategists said in a similar vein: "Clinton bought it once, Bush bought it again, and we're not going to buy it a third time" (Sanger, 2009). Pyongyang for its own part has blamed Washington for turning the 2005 agreement into a "dead document" (KNS, 2009), and declined to resume denuclearization talks precisely on the grounds that previous such attempts had failed due to US hostile policy (Reuters, 2015b).9 In the wake of each collapsed deal, the United States also resorted to economic pressures and/or military threats, with the hopes that North Korea would return to the bargaining table or even disarm itself unconditionally. However, these coercive measures rather heightened Pyongyang's sense of insecurity and thereby reinforced its aspiration for nuclear armament. For these reasons, diplomacy presently has an even lower chance of success than it did in 1994 or 2005. The recent Iranian nuclear deal has not imbued Pyongyang and Washington with any more eagerness to take proactive steps toward a third agreement of their own, despite their rhetorical avowals of being "open" to negotiations (Gale, 2015; Mullen, 2015; National Journal, 2013; Reuter, 2015a).

#### Denuclearization is key to solve US-North Korean war that goes nuclear --- yielding diplomacy to China is the only way to make deals effective

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The drama that is playing out now over North Korea’s nuclear and missile program—accentuated Tuesday by that regime’s large-scale artillery drill—represents one of the most dangerous challenges for U.S. national security since the end of the Cold War. It is a crisis that has been building for a long time, as North Korea has broken through the nuclear barrier and possesses fissile material sufficient for 20 to 25 nuclear weapons, by one estimate. After many failed attempts, through pressure and negotiations, to bring an end to North Korea’s nuclear program, three new elements have heightened the urgency of the situation.

First, North Korea is racing to develop an intercontinental ballistic missile capable of hitting the continental United States. In his annual New Years address in January, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un [declared](http://www.ncnk.org/resources/news-items/kim-jong-uns-speeches-and-public-statements-1/kim-jong-uns-2017-new-years-address) his country to be “in the final stage of preparation for the test launch” of such a missile. Moreover, experts warn, North Korea could at some point in the next few year years make the terrifying technological leap to a hydrogen bomb, which could be up to 1,000 times more destructive than the nuclear weapons that now comprise the North Korean arsenal.

Currently there are only two adversarial powers capable of hitting the U.S. with such awesome destructive power, Russia and China. That a regime so murderous, megalomaniacal, and unpredictable as North Korea’s—the last truly totalitarian regime on earth, holding more than 100,000 of its own people in political concentration camps—could have the potential to inflict such destruction on the United States should be considered unacceptable.

The second relatively new element is North Korea’s young leader, Kim Jong Un. Although he has been North Korea’s absolute and “supreme” leader for more than five years, the world is still learning the full measure of his ambition, paranoia, and recklessness. This is a man who has not hesitated to murder even family members, including allegedly his half-brother, to consolidate absolute control. In pushing an ambitious program of nuclear testing and missile development, he also appears more inclined to take risks to expand his power and eliminate imagined threats than his father, Kim Jong Il. Even the faint glimmers of a possible loosening of absolute political control by North Korea’s communist party, the Worker’s Party of Korea, have been suffocated under Kim Jong Un.

The third element is the tough-talking new American president, Donald Trump.  While the new American administration has declared the end of “[strategic patience](http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/rex-tillerson-declares-end-to-strategic-patience-with-iran-slams-nuclear-deal/article/2620719)” and vowed that the North Korean missile threat “[will be taken care of,](http://www.vanityfair.com/news/2017/04/donald-trump-north-korea-strike)” Trump is pursuing a more “transactional” approach to engaging China in pursuit of a diplomatic resolution of the crisis. Thus, North Korea is reported to have figured prominently in the first head-to-head meeting between Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping at the president’s Mar-a-Lago estate recently.

It is difficult to exaggerate the stakes here. A preemptive strike on North Korea’s military facilities would have nothing like the limited scope of containment or punishment conveyed by the recent American cruise missile strike on Syria. To accomplish anything meaningful, an American strike on North Korea would have to be on a scale many, many times larger. Even then, it would likely fail to eliminate all of Kim’s short-range missiles (many of which are mobile) or his nuclear weapons (which are surely hidden). And so it could bring on the [worst of all scenarios](https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/04/north-korea/523080/), a furious military response from North Korea with its nuclear arsenal still intact, putting millions of lives in South Korea and potentially Japan as well at imminent risk.

It is no wonder, then, that the Trump administration has rather quickly discovered the virtues of a diplomatic track. Yet the six-party talks, launched in 2003 among Japan, South Korea, Russia, China, the U.S., and North Korea to find a diplomatic formula to halt North Korea’s nuclear program, have been suspended since 2009. While efforts to resume those talks have been surrounded by mutual threats and false starts, North Korea has raced ahead to build an ever more menacing nuclear weapons program, which is now bringing the region to a crisis potentially more serious than anything since the end of the Korean War.

As the old saying goes, however, in crisis there is both danger and opportunity. In his summit with the Chinese leader, President Trump clearly became aware of the complexity of the situation as seen by the Chinese regime: North Korea is not a mere client state of China, and a Chinese attempt to use its economic leverage (such as cutting off essential food and oil supplies) to pressure the Kim dictatorship could bring unpredictable consequences, including, the Chinese fear, a collapse of the North Korean regime that would send millions of North Korean refugees streaming across the border into China.

Yet the Chinese leadership is clearly deeply frustrated with North Korea’s erratic and menacing behavior, which increasingly endangers China’s vital interests in regional peace and stability. It is this incipient shift in China’s thinking that presents the most promising opportunity for a breakthrough on the long-stalled diplomatic front. Whether through a resumption of the six-party talks or initiation of direct three-party negotiations involving China, the U.S., and North Korea (with the U.S. closely coordinating with Japan and South Korea), a diplomatic breakthrough must be pursued.

It is probably not realistic at this point to think that North Korea will give up its current stockpile of nuclear weapons. But at a minimum, resolution of the current crisis requires a version of what my Stanford colleague Siegfried Hecker first proposed—that the Kim regime [commit to “four no’s”](http://thebulletin.org/hecker-assesses-north-korean-hydrogen-bomb-claims9046): no more bombs that would enlarge its current stockpile; no better bombs, and hence an end to nuclear weapons testing; no missile testing or production that would enhance their current range; and no export of bombs or other nuclear weapons or missile technology.

These will be hugely difficult goals to achieve through diplomacy. But there are some inducements the United States and its allies could offer the North that might help bring it (reluctantly) to agree. There is also significant leverage that the U.S. and China could jointly bring to bear on Kim Jong Un to raise the costs of his continuing on the current immensely dangerous path. And there are some things that the U.S. could offer China that might help persuade it to assume the risks of pressuring an unstable and unpredictable “ally.”

North Korea has depicted its relentless pursuit of nuclear weapons as a defensive maneuver to deter an attack on it by the United States, Japan, and South Korea. But the problem is that any new weapon changes the balance of power among adversaries. The greater North Korea’s nuclear weapons capacity, the more emboldened it may be to engage in reckless, bullying behavior in the region.

We are now at an existential moment, where North Korea must be confronted with a fundamental choice: Either it will face crippling global economic sanctions (including a Chinese oil embargo) that could trigger the collapse of the regime, or it will negotiate a verifiable end to its nuclear weapons development program.

The North’s willingness to give up its weapons program would serve as a prerequisite for talks about new ways to defuse tensions on the Korean peninsula—including a peace treaty that recognizes the North Korean regime, normalization of relations between the U.S. and North Korea, and flows of investment and trade that would help to modernize the North’s economy. Toward the end of Bill Clinton’s presidency, when he was pursuing a diplomatic approach to resolving the North Korean nuclear threat, former U.S. Defense Secretary William Perry [found](http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/04/north-korea-nuclear-deal-donald-trump-china-215034) the North Koreans to be seriously interested in the prospect of normalizing relations with the U.S.

With respect to economic incentives, more would be possible for North Korea in terms of investment and trade from the U.S., Japan, and South Korea to the extent that North Korea takes the reform path that China did in 1978 under Deng Xiaoping. This would mean not only greatly accelerating market-oriented reforms in the North but also closing down the country’s concentration camps and allowing a modicum of political openness as well. America’s goal in this process would not be to bring an end to the North Korean regime, but to bring an end to its failed policies, which propel it toward militarism and aggression to cover up for its manifest developmental failures.

What could induce China to take risks for peace? One irony of having elected a U.S. president who repeatedly threatened a trade war with China is that a retreat from those ill-considered warnings now appears as a conciliatory gesture. But there is something more the U.S. can offer. China’s fear of a sudden collapse of the Kim regime is not just about massive refugee flows. It also dreads a “German-style” reunification, in which South Korea would politically absorb the north and China would then confront a newly powerful American ally—hosting nearly 30,000 American troops—right on its border.

Because the North Korean regime is not irrational, it will probably opt for the above deal under Chinese pressure and American inducements. But should Kim Jong Un balk and his regime then unravel, leading to reunification under a democratic constitution, American troops would no longer be needed to stabilize the Korean peninsula, and they could be withdrawn. Neither should there be a need for the missile defense system (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, THAAD) that is now being deployed in South Korea, over real but misplaced Chinese concerns that the system is aimed partly at them. Agreement to withdraw THAAD and American troops following Korean reunification would be huge elements of strategic reassurance for China. On the flip side, however, the U.S. retains coercive inducements to get China on its side, [namely](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/one-powerful-weapon-to-use-against-north-korea/2017/04/21/ddbb9702-26c2-11e7-bb9d-8cd6118e1409_story.html?tid=a_inl&utm_term=.4d24efb00424) the option of imposing secondary sanctions on Chinese banks that do business with North Korean front companies.

#### China multilateralism is based on win win deals instead of coercion which makes it more sustainable long term.

Zhimin Chen 17, School of International Relations and Public Affairs, Fudan University, “Facilitative Leadership and China’s New Role in the World,” Chinese Political Science Review, 3.1, 10-27

Facilitative international leadership emphasizes that key actors should lead collectively in a cooperative way. In the past, there were cases when one country led a country bloc. For example, during the Cold War, the two superpowers had dominance in their blocs, respectively. After the end of the Cold War, the US and its allies regarded the world as a unipolar system and could pursue a US-centric international leadership. However, US international leadership is losing its power base in politics and economy as well as its legitimacy. The world needs cooperative leadership. The G20 is a new institution that contrasts to unilateral leadership. Facilitative leadership demands plural leaders and tries to have collective leadership. With the rise of the emerging countries, the international system is becoming multipolarized or de-centered to such an extent that any attempt to restore unilateral leadership will be dampened, and stronger collective leadership will be demanded to address the risks and challenges in this transitional period. As a signatory state of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), China has made substantial contributions to nuclear non-proliferation and to dealing with the Iranian nuclear issue along with other major powers such as the US, Russia and Germany (Pang 2012, 210). In global economic governance, faced with economic stagnation, rising protectionism, and a wider gap between rich and poor, China has promoted inclusive development through the G20 summit in Hangzhou in 2016. Facilitative leadership is win–win leadership to promote common goals of the international community. In the past, international leadership usually served the leader’s own national interest, especially its pursuit of power. Even when a country tries to get recognition as leader by providing international public goods, this leadership is still a solipsistic leadership if the country’s purpose is to establish its powerful status. This kind of solipsistic leadership’s sustainability and legitimacy remain uncertain. Unlike solipsistic leadership, win–win leadership is more sustainable and legitimate, which can assist other countries’ development. Chinese President Xi Jinping said at his speech when he visited the Parliament of Mongolia in 2014 that ‘‘you can take a ride on our express train or just make a hitchhike, all are welcome’’ and ‘‘we will never do things that could result in ‘one wins and the other loses’ or ‘one wins more and the other gets less’. We will take into consideration the other side’s interests in some specific projects’’.8 Under the facilitative leadership, the establishment of a leader is based on the promotion of the win–win development of the leading country and all other countries. In an ideal situation, the leader will also update international norms and each and every country’s interest. For example, the ideas of ‘‘a community of common destiny’’ and ‘‘inclusive growth’’ proposed by China focus on a higher level of cooperation to achieve win–win development. Facilitative leadership mainly uses attraction to influence and lead. Economic attraction constitutes the main source of China’s global attraction. China can use its enormous domestic market to provide opportunities for others’ exports and investment via mutually beneficial cooperation. It can also use China’s capital and technology to help others develop and, at the same time, promote its own development. Based on this idea, China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has been welcomed by more and more countries, which shows China’s economic attractive leadership. China should also pay attention to its institutional leadership. In the past few years, China has helped to establish the New Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, both of them having their headquarters in China. It has played a key role in the Paris agreement on climate change and the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. China has sent most military personnel to UN peacekeeping as a permanent member of UN Security Council, and is the third largest financial contributor to the UN regular budget and the second largest donor to the UN peace-keeping budget. Being actively involved in these institutions can strengthen China’s institutional leadership in international affairs. In addition, China should be an important leader in providing solutions. In the G20 China Summit and International Economic Forum in Davos, China has demonstrated that it could and does want to assume that role. As for leadership style, China should be an empowering leader, not a hierarchical patronal leader. A hierarchical patronal leader not only establishes new common goals for the others, but also believes that they have the solutions to all problems. In the post-Cold War period, western countries claimed that domestic problems could be easily solved by adopting the western economic and political system. When such a system is not working, western countries propose global governance to replace national governance. In the 21st century, western interventions have brought chaos to a number of developing countries. The results prove that a hierarchical patronal leadership cannot really solve the problems. China should be an empowering leader and recognize the differences among countries. A foreign country cannot impose its solutions onto other countries, and should respect the primary role of other countries in managing their own problems. Therefore, an empowering leader respects others’ sovereignty, supports capability building in other countries and helps other countries to develop problem-solving solutions of their own. Through empowering and providing support, such a facilitative leadership will be much easier for others to accept. Facilitative international leadership needs legitimacy to ensure its effectiveness. A legitimate leader should have more or less voluntary endorsement from others. A country that aspires to lead will lose legitimacy if it only forces others to follow, since this kind of followership is forced, and does not represent a willing choice. Once the coercion is weakened, the coercive leadership can neither sustain nor achieve its goals.

### 1NC—Africa War

#### No escalation- great powers won’t intervene in Africa- Sudan proves

**Barrett, 5** -- Ph.D. student in Strategic Studies and Conflict Resolution

(Robert, Ph.D. student, Strategic Studies and Conflict Resolution Centre for Military and Strategic Studies University of Calgary Canada, MA, Conflict Analysis and Management, “Understanding the Challenges of African Democratization through Conflict Analysis,” 6-1-5, http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/Delivery.cfm/SSRN\_ID726162\_code327511.pdf?abstractid=726162&mirid=1, accessed 1-18-12)

Westerners eager to promote democracy must be wary of African politicians who promise democratic reform without sincere commitment to the process. Offering money to corrupt leaders in exchange for their taking small steps away from autocracy may in fact be a way of pushing countries into anocracy. As such, world financial lenders and interventionists who wield leverage and influence must take responsibility in considering the ramifications of African nations who adopt democracy in order to maintain elite political privileges. The obvious reason for this, aside from the potential costs in human life should conflict arise from hastily constructed democratic reforms, is the fact that Western donors, in the face of intrastate war would then be faced with channeling funds and resources away from democratization efforts and toward conflict intervention based on issues of human security. This is a problem, as Western nations may be increasingly wary of intervening in Africa hotspots after experiencing firsthand the unpredictable and unforgiving nature of societal warfare in both Somalia and Rwanda. On a costbenefit basis, the West continues to be somewhat reluctant to get to get involved in Africa’s dirty wars, evidenced by its political hesitation when discussing ongoing sanguinary grassroots conflicts in Africa. Even as the world apologizes for bearing witness to the Rwandan genocide without having intervened, the United States, recently using the label ‘genocide’ in the context of the Sudanese conflict (in September of 2004), has only proclaimed sanctions against Sudan, while dismissing any suggestions at actual intervention (Giry, 2005). Part of the problem is that traditional military and diplomatic approaches at separating combatants and enforcing ceasefires have yielded little in Africa. **No powerful nations want to get embroiled** in conflicts they cannot win – especially those conflicts in which the intervening nation has very little interest.

#### No great power war in Africa- no serious interests

**Fehrenbach, 8 --** American author and former head of the Texas Historical Commission

(T.R., "Central Asia ripe for next Big One," San Antonio Express-News, 3-9-8, l/n, accessed 1-16-12)

Me, I've never been a Holy Land-Armageddon fan. The nexus of the world's powers aren't right for that. Israel and Arabs can have at it; Shiites and Sunnis murder by the millions, but like genocidal rampages in Africa, these are simply not planet-threatening. I'm talking big war. To create a serious conflict, important great-power interests must be involved, producing fear and loathing among the world's empires. China and Russia may mess around in the Middle East to tweak Uncle Sam's nose, but we all know that while we have vital stakes there, they do not. The same with Africa: The U.S., European Union and China are all vying for influence and resources on the continent, but this is in nobody's backyard. African wars are usually fought by proxies and a few paratroops.

#### Escalation empirically denied and based on cold war thinking- states will cooperate and peace-keep

**Cilliers, 2k --** Institute for Security Studies (South Africa) executive director

(Jakkie, "African Security," Paper by Jakkie Cilliers at the Ministerial Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Co-operation in Africa, May 2000, www.iss.co.za/uploads/CONFREPCSSDCA.PDF, accessed 1-18-12)

Direct conflict between African states such as that which we see between Ethiopia and Eritrea has, in fact, been a relatively isolated phenomenon. Not so war by proxy. Today any numbers of African countries are involved in indirect confrontations with one another. Often these conflicts are conducted through support to armed opposition parties in neighbouring states, sometimes with a religious or ethnic character, often taking place in a third country, drawing others into the war and expanding the conflict. There are many examples of these activities in the Horn and in Central Africa. In other cases neighbouring countries have involved themselves directly in the internal affairs of others or allowed their territory to be used as a springboard for such involvement. Possibly the most obvious examples today relate to what is happening in central and eastern parts of the DR Congo. Yet in other instances countries have been drawn into conflicts by their difficulty to control their often inhospitable and rugged borders, particularly when international boundaries cut through rather than follow broad ethnic and tribal divides. During the Cold War regional conflicts were at once internationalised and subsumed within the superpower competition and controlled to avoid escalation into nuclear conflict. In the process the strategic relevance of regions such as Africa was elevated as part of the global chessboard - pawns in a much larger game. At the beginning of the twenty-first century the situation is much changed. **Africa has lost its strategic relevance**. Apart from humanitarian concerns, only selected areas with exploitable natural resources demand the attention of the larger and more powerful countries. A blurring in the clear demarcation of roles between sub-regional, regional and international organisations - the UN in particular — has occurred after the end of the Cold War. During the bi-polar era, the division of labour was clear. The UN mounted peacekeeping operations and deployed political missions, while regional organisations concentrated on preventive diplomacy. The proliferation of internal conflicts after the fall of the Berlin Wall has confounded this clear division. Almost as if to mirror this trend, the increase in the number and the nature of the various actors involved in internal conflicts have further complicated the ability of state-centred negotiations and mediation to succeed. The response of the international community and much of Africa, to the challenge of instability on the continent is generally hostage to the state-centred peacekeeping debate. It is to peacekeeping that commentators turn when looking for solutions to violent crises, crises that are very different to those envisaged at the end of Second World War when the UN Charter was drafted. Globally a new security paradigm seems to be emerging. This consists of regions accepting co-responsibility and sharing the burden to police themselves and a dilution of the central role that many had hoped that the United Nations would play in this regard. This agenda is primarily, but not exclusively, driven by the United States that is seeking co-option and burden sharing by others in the hegemonic role that the demise of the Soviet Union had thrust upon it. The most recent and arguably the most important indication of this trend is the US drive for NATO to undertake so-called non-Article 5 missions and US support for a greater ‘European defence identity’ as opposed to a transatlantic identity. A combination of developments — Africa’s peripheral status in a period of global financial instability, Western peacekeeping failure’s in Somalia, Rwanda and in Angola, and the enthusiasm for sub-regional initiatives under the auspices of organisations such as ECOWAS and SADC — have led to successive French, British, American and other initiatives to build African peacekeeping capacities to deal with African emergencies. In this process of obtaining ‘peacekeeping on the cheap’, countries such as Nigeria and Ghana have had to bear a huge burden in financial, diplomatic and political resources. The recent push by the international community in Sierra Leone and MONUC in the DR Congo represent a welcome but tentative return to Africa that holds promise and may, if successfully concluded, indicate a limited re-engagement of Africa. Therefore the importance of ensuring that recent developments in Sierra Leone not derail this tentative reengagement. But there can be little doubt that the era of ‘lean peacekeeping’ has arrived which will require the ability to ‘make do’ with available resources where peacekeepers are neither impartial nor busy with consensual peacekeeping. These operations will also appear to remain essentially Third World operations within which the role of the developed world is a logistically and financially supportive one. African peacekeepers will have to adapt to these conditions of stringency and efficacy in seeking to deal with complex emergencies and we will have to ensure that the international community does indeed come up with the supportive peacebuilding abilities and developmental engagement that is required by these often intractable problems.

### 1NC—Heg Good

#### Treat their evidence with skepticism — pro-hegemony authors stem from a dense network of think tanks and elite universities that manipulate money and influence to censor dissent.

Parmar, 19 — Inderjeet Parmar is professor of International Politics at City, University of London, and Head of the Department of International Politics. He is a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences, and past President of the British International Studies Association. (June 3rd, 2019; “Transnational Elite Knowledge Networks: Managing American Hegemony in Turbulent Times;” pg. 6-8; *Security Studies*; DOI: 10.1080/09636412.2019.1604986; //GrRv)

American elite knowledge networks center on the strategic and heavily interconnected corporate-philanthropic foundation. The liberal Ford and Rockefeller foundations and conservative variants all fund knowledge networks.28 Unburdened by electors or shareholders, these institutions are governed by trustees drawn from corporations, government, corporate media, and elite universities. Their elitist mindsets and ethno-racial and class identities differentiate these trustees from the majority of Americans. We can track the rise of American global hegemony by exploring the increasing significance of foundations and the institutional architecture that owes its origins to concentrated corporate wealth. At home, this comprised a dense network of think tanks, university foreign affairs organizations, area studies, and social-scientific programs, all of which interlinked with practitioners in politics, media, and government. These elite knowledge networks built long-term relationships that created pathways for the international circulation of ideas, people, and money, and usually connected strongly with American organizations like the Institute of Pacific Relations and the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR). These knowledge networks’ greatest achievement is the elaboration of a liberal-internationalist elite consensus that rejects isolationism and spans the two main political parties, the media, and attentive publics. With the American state’s full cooperation, such knowledge networks helped to establish the post-1945 liberal international order that included Bretton Woods, the United Nations, the Marshall Plan, and NATO.

Official institutions of the liberal international order included the intertwined spines of the private and state-private institutional architecture that had been established during the Cold War to perform the major functions of US hegemonic knowledge networks. These networks grew deep roots in core Western states and civil societies. Symbiotic with NATO, European unity, and the special relationship between the United States and the United Kingdom, such networks provided an international umbrella and developed politically powerful domestic constituencies that were invested in the liberal international order.29

Nevertheless, hegemony studies neglects American ideational-infrastructural power that is operationalized and embedded in influential power-knowledge networks, with linkages that unify private/public domains and international/domestic spheres, and that legitimize domestic vertical power inequality and horizontal inequalities between societies. Those networks are the power technology of the foreign policy establishment.30 Such neglect diminishes our understanding of the forces that perpetuate American hegemony and enable hegemonic elites to block or manage discontent. This article’s neo-Gramscian argument is that, despite crises and challenges that include the disruptive effects of Donald Trump’s presidential campaign and subsequent Twitter-disseminated rhetoric, those networks continue to successfully manage, channel, or block threats to American hegemony. Such networks are likely to remain significant during the Trump presidency, and to constrain attempts to radically alter the liberal international order.

American hegemony, because it is imperial in character and rooted in domestic power elites, is contested at home and abroad—more or less openly—depending on the balance of forces. Hegemony sets requirements on the hegemon. These requirements include delivery of certain freedoms, rights, security, and opportunities, which together construct “the American dream,” as well as a stable world order in which prosperity increases and aspirations appear achievable.31

#### Empirics go neg – most qualified studies disprove hegemonic stability theories.

Fettweis 17 –Christopher J. Fettweis is an American political scientist and the Associate Professor of Political Science at Tulane University. “Unipolarity, Hegemony, and the New Peace, Security Studies” 26:3, 423-451; EG)

Even the most ardent supporters of the hegemonic-stability explanation do not contend that US influence extends equally to all corners of the globe. The United States has concentrated its policing in what George Kennan used to call “strong points,” or the most important parts of the world: Western Europe, the Pacific Rim, and Persian Gulf.64 By doing so, Washington may well have contributed more to great power peace than the overall global decline in warfare. If the former phenomenon contributed to the latter, by essentially providing a behavioral model for weaker states to emulate, then perhaps this lends some support to the hegemonic-stability case.65 During the Cold War, the United States played referee to a few intra-West squabbles, especially between Greece and Turkey, and provided Hobbesian reassurance to Germany’s nervous neighbors. Other, equally plausible explanations exist for stability in the first world, including the presence of a common enemy, democracy, economic interdependence, general war aversion, etc. The looming presence of the leviathan is certainly among these plausible explanations, but only inside the US sphere of influence. Bipolarity was bad for the nonaligned world, where Soviet and Western intervention routinely exacerbated local conflicts. Unipolarity has generally been much better, **but whether or not this was due to US action is again unclear.** Overall US interest in the affairs of the Global South has dropped markedly since the end of the Cold War, as has the level of violence in almost all regions. There is less US intervention in the political and military affairs of Latin America compared to any time in the twentieth century, for instance, and also less conflict. Warfare in Africa is at an all-time low, as is relative US interest outside of counterterrorism and security assistance.66 **Regional peace and stability exist where there is US active intervention, as well as where there is not**. No direct relationship seems to exist across regions. If intervention can be considered a function of direct and indirect activity, of both political and military action, a regional picture might look like what is outlined in Table 1. These assessments of conflict are by necessity relative, because there has not been a “high” level of conflict in any region outside the Middle East during the period of the New Peace. Putting aside for the moment that important caveat, some points become clear. The great powers of the world are clustered in the upper right quadrant, where US intervention has been high, but conflict levels low. **US intervention is imperfectly correlated with stability, however. Indeed, it is conceivable that the relatively high level of US interest and activity has made the security situation in the Persian Gulf and broader Middle East worse.** In recent years, substantial hard power investments (Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq), moderate intervention (Libya), and reliance on diplomacy (Syria) have been equally ineffective in stabilizing states torn by conflict. While it is possible that the region is essentially unpacifiable and no amount of police work would bring peace to its people, it remains hard to make the case that the US presence has improved matters. **In this “strong point,” at least, US hegemony has failed to bring peace.** In much of the rest of the world, the United States has not been especially eager to enforce any particular rules. Even rather incontrovertible evidence of genocide has not been enough to inspire action. Washington’s intervention choices have at best been erratic; Libya and Kosovo brought about action, but much more blood flowed uninterrupted in Rwanda, Darfur, Congo, Sri Lanka, and Syria. The US record of peacemaking is not exactly a long uninterrupted string of successes. During the turn-of-the-century conventional war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, a highlevel US delegation containing former and future National Security Advisors (Anthony Lake and Susan Rice) made a half-dozen trips to the region, but was unable to prevent either the outbreak or recurrence of the conflict. Lake and his team shuttled back and forth between the capitals with some frequency, and President Clinton made repeated phone calls to the leaders of the respective countries, offering to hold peace talks in the United States, all to no avail.67 The war ended Table 1. Post-Cold War US intervention and violence by region. High Violence Low Violence High US Intervention Middle East Europe South and Central Asia Pacific Rim North America Low US Intervention Africa South America Former Soviet Union in late 2000 when Ethiopia essentially won, and it controls the disputed territory to this day. The Horn of Africa is hardly the only region where states are free to fight one another today without fear of serious US involvement. Since they are choosing not to do so with increasing frequency, something else is probably affecting their calculations. Stability exists even in those places where the potential for intervention by the sheriff is minimal. Hegemonic stability can only take credit for influencing those decisions that would have ended in war without the presence, whether physical or psychological, of the United States. It seems hard to make the case that the relative peace that has descended on so many regions is primarily due to the kind of heavy hand of the neoconservative leviathan, or its lighter, more liberal cousin. Something else appears to be at work.

#### If we win US hegemony low, they get no offense --- declining states must retrench or they risk overextension and a catastrophic loss in credibility that makes their impacts inevitable

MacDonald and Parent 18 Paul K. MacDonald and Joseph M. Parent. MacDonald is an Associate Professor of Political Science at Wellesley University. Parent is associate professor of political science at the University of Notre Dame. “Twilight of the Titans: Great Power Decline and Retrenchment.” Cornell University Press. 2018.

Third, preventive war theories obsess over the appearance of credibility, not where it comes from or how much it is worth. For Gilpin, the “fundamental problem with a policy of appeasement or accommodation” is that it leads to “continuing deterioration in a state’s prestige and international position.” But commitments are checks: they only cash when there is something behind them. In world politics, power is the closest equivalent to money, and as a declining state’s power draws down, it has to be more frugal. Great powers cannot be fooled for long; commitments must be backed. Yet declining powers have less capability and must decide whether to keep a stronger, shorter defensive perimeter, or a longer, weaker one. Preventive war theories assert the sanctity of credibility in theory as they recommend overdrawing it in practice. And, while the debate remains lively, credibility in the abstract appears to be worth less than policymakers believe. Great powers are not obligated to defend their interests with equal vigor, and accommodation in one area does not necessarily invite exploitation in others. A reputation for bluffing can be worse than a reputation for weakness.

Most important, credibility is more multifaceted and contextual than preventive war theories assume. Great powers certainly worry about their power and prestige, but their commitments are not of equal weight, and concessions in one area need not be seen as weakening commitments elsewhere. The fact that commitments are complex allows declining powers to shift burdens and concentrate capabilities at key points of challenge. Tactical retreats and strongpoint defenses make deterrence more robust and threats more credible, and may help signal benign intentions. The multifaceted nature of commitments also provides crafty rising challengers with opportunities to challenge the status quo in places that dominant powers are unlikely to vigorously defend. Rising powers that undertake modest challenges to the status quo in less sensitive areas send the most important signal that they do not intend to forcibly overturn the existing order. In this way, rising powers can take advantage of their newfound strength without generating incentives for declining powers to clip their wings.

Altogether, these points suggest that shifts in power are concerning but rarely generate strong incentives for war. Declining powers will be drawn to preventive war when uncommon stars align: if war is likely to succeed, if the consequences of war can be managed, if victory will reverse flagging fortunes, and if there are no better options. A declining power must also be confident that rising challengers will continue to ascend rapidly up the ranks, that they will fight to assure their ascendance, and that they are bent on future domination. In the absence of these conditions, pugnacious policies make little sense. Defeat in a preventive war opens the floodgates for exploitation on multiple fronts, and even a successful war can compromise a great power to the point of vulnerability. Typically, states will manage the very real, but often ambiguous, dangers that accompany decline with more caution than aggression.

### 1NC—Misc

#### Heg is dead – outweighs Ikenberry on recency – COVID, Iraq, financial crisis, and Trump, and China is stability-oriented.

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The remainder of the century saw the United States bestride the world as the dominant power, sometimes for better and often for worse. But Luce was correct that it was the American Century (or at least half-century). As of 2020, though, the 21st century has become “the Anti-American Century,” an identity already well-advanced before the pandemic but certainly accelerated and cemented by it. The Anti-American Century may turn out to be aggressively hostile to the United States, but for now it is anti-American mostly in the sense of being antithetical to the American Century. The three pillars of American strength—military, economic, and political—that defined the last century have each been undermined if not obliterated. In this moment, those failures may seem like profound negatives. In his most recent book, the writer Robert Kagan laments that, without American leadership around the world, the jungle will grow back. In the United States’ absence, Beijing may be able to define a less liberal world order. In terms of domestic politics, the left and the right are oddly united in their despair at the erosion of the American Century, as the left bemoans the failure of the American experiment in an age of racial divisions and government ineptitude and the right defends to the hilt “Make America Great Again” redux.

Yet the dawn of the Anti-American Century may be precisely what both the world and the United States need to meet the particular challenges of today. A world of nearly 7.8 billion people demands multiple nodes of support, not one hegemon or two jockeying for power. And a United States of great affluence and great deficiencies needs to accept that it is not ordained to lead and that its past results are, as investors like to disclaim, no guarantee of future success. The first step to solving a problem is acknowledging that you have one; failure to do so—to believe only that one’s country is uniquely powerful and destined by history and culture for greatness—is a recipe for a fall. At the dawn of the new millennium, a scant 20 years ago that feels like an eternity, the United States was able to say to itself and the world that it had found a uniquely potent formula for how to manage democracy. It pointed to its role as a global superpower and its resilient and flourishing economy. It asserted that it had excelled in advanced research, education, and innovation and stood as an example to countries everywhere. All that was never nearly as true as Americans wished it to be, but those strengths were, relative to much of the world, undeniable. The pandemic has exposed structural fissures in the United States. It has also underscored that a country whose central government is constrained not just by the three-branch structure of the federal government but also by substantial local and state autonomy is not particularly well suited to marshaling a forceful national effort that isn’t an actual war. But the tut-tutting and eye-rolling abroad about the anemic U.S. response to the COVID-19 pandemic (“The world is taking pity on us,” went the line in one prominent column and in many other since) is simply the next iteration of a process that has been unfolding for two decades.

The first pillar of the American Century to be knocked aside was military. The U.S. invasion of Afghanistan after 9/11 enjoyed considerable support internationally as a justified response to the Taliban’s sheltering of al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden. But the subsequent invasion of Iraq in March 2003 with a paucity of international support followed by a bungled occupation and years of guerrilla war against American troops evoked the Vietnam War. Initial misgivings were exponentially magnified by revelations of American-sanctioned torture in Iraq, at the Guantánamo Bay detention facility, and at various sites around the world, in clear contravention of the Geneva Conventions that the United States had long defended. Add to that revelations of spying on domestic citizens in the name of national security and the war on terrorism, and many of the pieties of American strength crumbled. The United States emerged by 2008 from its Iraq imbroglio with its military still second to none in size and capacity but with its image severely undermined.

The second pillar to crumble was economic. One of the central conceits of Luce’s American Century was that the unique virtues of the American economic system would act as a powerful rebuke of communism. And even after the fall of the Soviet Union, the flourishing American economy was a magnet for talent and innovation, with U.S. technology firms defining the first internet boom of the 1990s and then the next wave in the 2000s. Meanwhile, the Washington Consensus that coalesced in the 1980s about how to structure free markets was the blueprint for post-1989 reconstruction of Eastern Europe and Russia. It was also used as a loose framework by both the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in their efforts to push countries around the world to drop trade barriers, end state-run businesses, and open up their capital accounts to global flows. While some countries, especially Russia, suffered mightily from this medicine, the sheer economic power of the United States left little alternative for most nations. China was the notable exception, and its size and the widespread perception that it would eventually move toward the U.S. model after joining the World Trade Organization allowed it to evolve along its own path. China’s economic success eroded American dominance, but it was the financial crisis of 2008-2009 that truly knocked away the economic pillar. For years, the question in investors’ minds had been: “When would the bad loans on the books of China’s state-owned banks lead to a crash in China?” It turned out that it wasn’t China’s banks that were the problem; it was banks in the United States. And they were a contagion that went global. The U.S.-led financial system survived, but the economic reputation of the United States—the prestige that Luce understood as a key element of its power—was devastated.

The final pillar was democracy. For decades, the United States could boast that it was the oldest and most established democracy in the world, with a singular system for preserving individual freedoms and harnessing collective energies. It routinely nudged and sometimes coerced allies and adversaries to open up and democratize. That in no way precluded dealing with dictators, but the presumption was that democracy was the best bulwark against autocracy and the best path to affluence. The United States, whatever its flaws, got democracy about as right as anyone. It was never quite the “strongest democracy” according to those who measured such things: The Scandinavian countries led there. But it was undoubtedly the strongest of the large and dynamic democracies, which combined with its other two pillars created the American Century. Then Donald Trump was elected president. Already by 2016, American democracy was showing signs of strain. Public faith and participation in government had so declined as to put the system on notice. But the election of Trump severely eroded the ability of Americans to say either to themselves or to the world that their process was uniquely able to withstand the pressures of populism and nascent authoritarianism that Americans for decades had preached against. Arguably, Trump has done much less damage than his many critics aver, and that may indeed reflect a domestic system of checks and balances that makes it devilishly difficult for any one president to commit major abuses of power. But the strength of American democracy in the world was also as a symbol and a beacon, one that drew immigrants and talent because of the opportunities that the United States offered and nurtured. On that score, the Trump administration dramatically eroded the United States’ global standing. Yes, the image of the United States also suffered mightily in the 1970s, with the humiliation of Vietnam and the revelations of American anti-democratic policies in much of what was then known as the Third World. It is possible that had the economic revival of the 1980s not happened, the American Century would have ended then. It didn’t, but then came the pandemic. Much as Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai once famously said of the legacy of the French Revolution that it was too soon to make final judgments, it is premature to start ranking nations conclusively by how well they met a pandemic that is still raging. It is clear, however, that what may be American strengths in other contexts are in this moment a panoply of weaknesses: decentralized domestic governance, highly contested politics, and immense cultural variations across states and regions. All of those inoculate Americans against autocracy and government overreach but leave the country vulnerable to national crises that require a unified response. Coming in the midst of the Trump administration, the American pandemic response has utterly crushed the image of the United States as an ambassador for good governance and democracy—and with it, the last pillar of the American Century.

Many in both the United States and throughout the world may believe that the end of the American Century is tragic, but the dawn of the Anti-American Century holds the promise of better times for the globe and the opportunity for Americans to finally confront their country’s structural problems. After all, unless one believes that the United States has a monopoly on the desire for peace, individual rights, and prosperity, 7.8 billion people and nearly 200 nations large and small are just as capable as Americans of acting in those collective interests. To believe otherwise is to hold that the only formula for international stability and prosperity is an endless continuation of the American Century. That inevitably leads to the question of China and its status as an emerging global power, especially as the United States retreats or is forced to. True, China defines rights differently than the United States, and many outside of China may not find that template an appealing one. But the Chinese template remains a Chinese one, propagated by a government that seems quite interested in keeping the global peace even while asserting its power. And whatever one thinks of China’s future, it remains true that you’d have to think that the United States is somehow a freakish and exceptional nation alone committed to peace and prosperity to believe firmly that the end of the American Century spells a backward step for humanity. As for the United State domestically, decades of global preeminence have not done Americans well at home in recent years. Standards of living have stagnated and not kept pace with those in numerous other countries. Racism persists. None of the countries that have excelled at education, health care, and standards of living are as large or complicated as the United States, but even by its own standards, the country has fallen short of what it once achieved. It spends massively on education, infrastructure, poverty alleviation, health care, and defense—but it does not manage to spend smartly. Yes, material life is better now for almost everyone than it was 50 years ago; people live longer, have more health care, eat better, are more educated, live in safer cities and towns, but that is true everywhere in the world. The United States cannot toot its own horn here. The simple fact is that success and strength—military, political, economic, and to that add cultural—are not birthrights. The United States doesn’t get to be great or powerful just because it used to be, although it certainly can help to have a head start. If the country was ever truly exceptional, it was exceptional because successive generations worked and fought and struggled to make it so, not because those generations patted themselves on the back. There have been acute moments of hubris and overreach during the decades of the American Century, but never has the disconnect between what the United States is and what Americans say it is been so profound. Out of this moment, therefore, is the promise not of American exceptionalism but American humility, a moment of recognition that, to move forward, the United States has to let go of the American Century, say goodbye to exceptionalism, and accept that it is a normal country like any other, just richer and with a massive military arsenal and multiple wells of strength and multiple areas of self-delusion. The end of the American Century offers the opportunity to look at where the country falls short and start fixing what is broken. Whether Americans will seize that opportunity, who knows. But this is not a tragedy; it is the beginning of something new.

#### No empirical support for transition wars --- they misunderstand incentive structures, accommodation theory is true, and conflict is contained --- this card smokes them

Wohlforth 17 William C. Wohlforth, William Curti Wohlforth is the Daniel Webster Professor of Government in the Dartmouth College Department of Government. “Chapter 3: Not Quite the Same as it Ever Was”, in “Will China’s Rise be Peaceful? The Rise of a Great Power in Theory, History, Politics, and the Future.” Oxford University Press. December 27, 2017.

A narrative has taken hold around the world that is directly relevant to this volume: that the material capabilities standing behind the dominant order are in relative decline, and, as a result, contestation – sometimes violent – over basic rules and institutions is on the rise. Legitimacy ultimately rests on power, the argument goes, and so rising powers will seek to undermine the legitimacy of the current order and establish new rules. If the status quo states resist, the result will be instability and hence insecurity. The narrative dominates punditry but also reflects the official policy and concrete, costly behavior of major powers. Putin’s Russia has forcefully toppled one of the foundational pillars of the 1991 settlement: respect for the territorial status quo in Eurasia. China’s neighbors accuse it of raising the specter of a forceful resolution of maritime boundary disputes in contravention of widely agreed regional norms and principles of international law. Both countries continue to increase military expenditures, in Russia’s case shouldering a greater relative burden than the United States (4.2 vs. 3.8 percent of GDP). The BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) grouping and its fellow travelers push back against Western-sponsored expansions of norms regarding human rights and legal armed intervention in sovereign states under the “responsibility to protect” (R2P) rubric. On global economic governance, rising powers seek greater roles in existing institutions or periodically work to create nascent regional alternatives. Not surprisingly, attempts to measure the effectiveness of institutionalized cooperation on a large range of key global issues find a depressing downward trend. Where is this headed? Many analysts portray current contestation as the leading edge of a full-blown conflict over the US-led global order. Ably represented in this collection by Christopher Layne’s chapter, their arguments often feature the use of terminology that suggests system-altering changes are afoot, for example, the claim that the unipolar era is over or a new multi- or bipolar world I nigh. Another indicator of this view is the popularity of the 1914 analogy: that China’s rise and its dissatisfaction with the status quo are like Wilhelmine Germany’s, raising similar risks of escalation and major military conflict. Against this view is the position championed in this volume most notably by John Ikenberry and Rosemary Foot, arguing that the current order is far more robust and resilient than the pessimists content. In this view, while contestation grabs the headlines, the main underlying trend is adaptation and accommodation. In this chapter, I address this question using the classical Gilpinian framework as well as more recent rise-and-decline scholarship. I argue that the balance of theory and evidence points to a more nuanced position: we are in for increased competitiveness and contestation; a harder-to-manage world has indeed arrived, but the essential structural imperatives that have operated for the last two decades are likely to remain in place. The pessimists overstate the scale and significance of change; the optimists understate the levels of dissatisfaction and the challenges of accommodation. I consider the implications of three key ways in which the current power shift differs from the canonical historical cases that inform much scholarship and commentary. In each case, there is a big implication and a qualifier. The big implication is that each change favors the status quo states and makes revisionism harder. The qualifier is that each also allows lower-level competition by creating incentives for challengers to challenge and status quo states to stick to current commitments. The three changes, considered in the sections that follow. are these: 1. The near certainty that all-out systemic war is off the table as a mechanism for hegemonic transition 2. The fact that the rising challenger to the system’s dominant state is credibly approaching peer status on only one dimension of state capability, gross economic output; and 3. The historically unprecedented degree of institutionalization in world politics coupled with the uniquely central role institutions play in the dominant power’s grand strategy. A “hegemonic war is characterized by the unlimited means employed and by the general scope of the warfare,” Robert Gilpin wrote over thirty years ago. “Because all parties are drawn into the war and the stakes involved are high, few limitations, if any, are observed with respect to the means employed.” Such a war is exceedingly unlikely to emerge among states armed with secure second-strike nuclear forces, whose core security, future power, and economic prosperity do not hinge on the physical control of others’ territory. We need to know what function these wars served in the past to assess the full implications of their expected absence in the future. Needless to say, there is no scholarly consensus on this question. Here I shall focus specifically on the main theories that assign this type of war an important role in explaining international politics, setting aside for now the many approaches that deny any special functional implications to especially large or costly wars. Two functional arguments are most prominent in the literature. For Gilpin, as for many theorists in the power-cycle tradition, the core function of hegemonic war is to resolve the contradiction between the underlying distribution of capabilities in the system and the hierarchy of prestige. His theory relies on a major lag between the diffusion of system capabilities away from the hegemon, on the one hand, and states’ ability to revise the international order accordingly, on the other hand. As capabilities shift to rising states, their dissatisfaction increases, as does their putative bargaining power, but the dominant states face incentives to hold fast defending the existing order. The gap between the system’s material “base” and its governance superstructure is resolved by a major war, which clarifies the distribution of capabilities and prestige, setting the stage for efficient bargaining over a new order. John Ikenberry stresses a second function: “Major or great-power war is a uniquely powerful agent of change in world politics because it tends to destroy and discredit old institutions and force the emergence of a new leading or hegemonic state.” The first part of Ikenberry’s argument seems intuitive, but it does not clear exactly how war “forces the emergene” of a new hegemon. Randall Schweller has most recently and fulsomely developed the core arguments for why hegemonic war alone can perform these functions. Other destructive events one can imagine, such as a global economic crash, pandemic, or environmental catastrophe, may wreak widespread destruction, but they are not driven by political logics and so cannot perform certain political functions. As Schweller argues, “It is precisely the political ends of hegemonic wars that distinguish them and the crucial international-political functions they perform – most important, crowning a new hegemonic king and wiping the global institutional slate clean – from mere cataclysmic global events.” On his view, only hegemonic war can force the emergence of a new hegemon, clarify power relations, and wipe the interstate institutional structure clean, leaving a tabula rasa for the newly anointed hegemon to write new rules. “The distasteful truth of history,” Schweller writes, “is that violent conflict not only cures the ill effects of political inertia and economic stagnation but is often the key that unlocks all the doors to radical and progressive historical change.” But this distasteful truth rests on an assumption: that war is indeed governed by political logic, while other kinds of global events (or states’ reactions to them) are not. And Clausewitz’s famous thesis that war is a continuation of politics has always been in tension with the antithesis also highlighted by the Prussian theorist: war’s inherent tendency to escape control. The argument that hegemonic wars are at root powerful political processes has yet to be subjected to focused empirical studies. For his part, Gilpin ignored the actual processes wrought by war, focusing almost exclusively on causes. Ikenberry’s narrative studies of postwar order building implicitly refer back to his arguments about war’s effects, but they are not structured around an investigation of these processes. And Schweller’s claim that hegemonic wars are necessary to prevent the degenerative “entrophy” of international politics rests entirely on contemporary evidence of disorder, ungovernability, dissolution, and dissipation rather than concrete evidence that hegemonic wars prevented these processes from occurring in the past.

#### Decline has popularized restraint – a bipartisan coalition formed to avoid the failures of liberal hegemony

Ashford 21 Emma Ashford is a Senior Fellow at the New American Engagement Initiative at the Atlantic Council’s Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security, September/October 2021, "Strategies of Restraint," Foreign Affairs, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2021-08-24/strategies-restraint> mvp

For nearly three decades after the end of the Cold War, U.S. foreign policy was characterized by a bipartisan consensus: that as the world’s “indispensable nation” and with no competitor, the United States had little choice but to pursue a transformational agenda on the world stage. Over the last few years, however, that consensus has collapsed. A growing chorus of voices are advocating a strategy of restraint—a less activist approach that focuses on diplomatic and economic engagement over military intervention. And they have found a receptive audience.

In that, they have undoubtedly been helped by circumstance: the United States’ failed “war on terror,” the rise of China, and growing partisan polarization at home have all made it clear that U.S. foreign policy cannot simply remain on autopilot. Even those who continue to argue for an interventionist approach to the world typically acknowledge that their strategy must be shorn of its worst excesses. Where restraint was once excluded from the halls of power and confined largely to academic journals, now some of its positions have become official policy.

Although President Donald Trump’s record was defined by dysfunction more than any coherent strategy, he did wind down the war in Afghanistan, raise doubts about the value of U.S. alliances in Europe and Asia, and question the wisdom of military intervention and democracy promotion. President Joe Biden, for his part, has begun withdrawing U.S. troops from Afghanistan, has initiated a review of the United States’ global military posture, and has taken steps to stabilize the U.S.-Russian relationship. In 2019, Jake Sullivan, now Biden’s national security adviser, wrote, “The U.S. must get better at seeing both the possibilities and the limits of American power.” That this sentiment is now openly embraced at the highest levels of government is nothing short of a win for those who have long called for a more restrained U.S. foreign policy.

Yet victory also raises a question: Where do restrainers go from here? With Washington having dialed down the war on terrorism, the most politically popular of their demands has been achieved. Now, they are liable to face an uphill battle over the rest of U.S. foreign policy, such as how to treat allies or what to do about China—issues that have little public salience or on which the restrainers are divided. Although often bundled together by Washington’s foreign policy elites and derided as isolationists, the members of the restraint community include a diversity of voices, running the gamut from left-wing antiwar activists to hard-nosed conservative realists. It should not be surprising that they disagree on much.

If the restraint camp focuses on what divides them rather than what unites them, then it will find itself consumed with internecine battles and excluded from decision-making at the very moment its influence could be at its height. But there is a viable consensus, a path forward for restraint that can achieve the most important goals, alienate the fewest members of the coalition, and win new converts. This more pragmatic strategy, which would entail the gradual lessening of U.S. military commitments, would not achieve the most ambitious of the restrainers’ goals. But it has the best chance of moving U.S. foreign policy in a more secure and more popular direction.

A DEBATE REBORN

The idea that the United States is uniquely qualified to reshape the world has manifested itself in different ways in the 30 years since the collapse of the Soviet Union marked the end of a bipolar world. Humanitarian intervention, democracy promotion, and counterterrorism—all were attempts to mold the world according to American preferences. Yet the unipolar moment has largely failed to live up to expectations. Today, democracy is in decline, there are more state-level conflicts than at any time since 1990, the war on terrorism has largely failed, and China’s rise has given the lie to the notion that the United States can prevent the emergence of peer competitors. Washington’s foreign policy community now appears to accept the need for a course correction, although it remains divided on the specifics.

Today, opinion is increasingly coalescing around three distinct views. The first of these is a modified form of liberal internationalism, the school of thought that believes that U.S. leadership is a stabilizing force in the world, emphasizes militarized deterrence, and has faith in a liberal, rules-based international order. Proponents of this approach often frame threats from China and Russia as threats to this order rather than as threats to concrete U.S. security interests. Yet the strain of this view dominant today is also, at least in theory, a softer, reformed version of the post–Cold War consensus, one that takes into account critiques of recent U.S. foreign policy and rejects parts of the war on terrorism.

Because they are more aware of the limits of American power than their predecessors, advocates of this view are best described as liberal internationalists, rather than liberal interventionists. The scholars Mira Rapp-Hooper and Rebecca Lissner—both of whom now serve on the National Security Council—belong to this camp. As they wrote in these pages in 2019, “Rather than wasting its still considerable power on quixotic bids to restore the liberal order or remake the world in its own image, the United States should focus on what it can realistically achieve.”

Restrainers have not offered a coherent alternative to today’s foreign policy.

Another alternative has percolated out of the synthesis of the Republican foreign policy establishment and the Trump administration: a form of belligerent unilateralism that prioritizes maintaining U.S. military primacy. This “America first” approach to the world is also a clear successor to the old consensus, but one that privileges power over diplomacy and U.S. interests over a liberal order. Like their liberal internationalist counterparts, the America firsters—both Trump administration alumni and more mainstream Republican foreign policy hands—have absorbed the notion that U.S. foreign policy has become unpopular, particularly among the GOP base. They have therefore shifted from democracy promotion and nation building toward a militarized global presence more akin to classic imperial policing.

They also reject some of the core liberal components of the old consensus, spurning diplomacy and arms control, fetishizing sovereignty, and preferring American solutions to global problems over multilateral solutions. For them, the liberal order is a mirage. As Nadia Schadlow, a veteran of the Trump White House, wrote in these pages in 2020, “Washington must let go of old illusions, move past the myths of liberal internationalism, and reconsider its views about the nature of the world order.”

Both approaches to the world are still problematic. A rebooted liberal internationalism may succeed at rehabilitating the United States’ image, but it is unlikely to advance democracy or build a unified liberal order through nonmilitary means when military ones have failed. And as the global balance of power shifts, liberal internationalism simultaneously overestimates the contributions that U.S. allies can make to collective defense and underestimates the differences they have with Washington. The “America first” approach, for its part, may yield short-term dividends—Trump, after all, was able to force U.S. allies to abide by sanctions on Iran and renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement—but it has diminishing returns. The more the United States uses coercive tools against other countries, the more they will look for ways to blunt those tools. And both approaches lean heavily on a forward U.S. military presence in ways that could all too easily trigger an unplanned conflict, particularly in Asia.

The remaining alternative, restraint, comes from outside the Washington policymaking world and is largely focused on these flaws. It is far more ideologically diverse than the other two, but most restrainers agree on several core principles. They share a conviction that the United States is a remarkably secure nation, that unlike many great powers in history, it faces no real threat of invasion, thanks to geography and nuclear weapons. They argue that U.S. foreign policy has been characterized in recent years by overreach and hubris, with predictably abysmal results. And they think U.S. foreign policy is overmilitarized, with policymakers spending too much on defense and too quickly resorting to force. Most important, advocates of restraint strike directly at the notion of the United States as the indispensable nation, considering it instead as but one among many global powers.

RESTRAINT’S MOMENT

The most common slap at restrainers is that they focus too much on criticism without offering plausible policy alternatives. That is not an entirely accurate evaluation; individual proponents of restraint have offered detailed prescriptions for everything from the war in Afghanistan to U.S.-Russian relations. But it is true that restrainers have often focused on what draws them together—namely, their shared criticisms of the status quo—rather than what would pull them apart: the question of which specific policies to implement instead. As restraint enters the mainstream conversation, the distinctions within this group are coming to the surface.

Restraint contains several different overlapping ideas. The first (and best defined) of these is an academic theory of grand strategy formulated by the political scientist Barry Posen in his 2014 book, Restraint. His version of restraint envisages a much smaller military based primarily within the United States. Other restrainers—such as the international relations theorists John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt—advocate a grand strategy of offshore balancing, a distinct but related approach that also calls for downsizing the United States’ global military role. (The distinction between the two is one of degree: Posen backs an entirely offshore military presence, whereas Mearsheimer and Walt admit that the United States may occasionally need to intervene to keep a hostile state from dominating a key region.) As grand strategies, both leave many granular policy details unstated, but they present internally coherent and fully formulated approaches to the world.

There is also a looser definition of “restraint.” Increasingly, the term is Washington shorthand for any proposal for a less militarized and activist foreign policy. That includes those put forth not just by academic realists but also by progressive Democrats and conservative Republicans in Congress, as well as various antiwar groups (such as Code Pink and the Friends Committee on National Legislation) and newer entrants into the antiwar space (such as the veterans’ group Common Defense). Thus, the term “restraint” is now used as often to signify this broader political movement as it is to describe a grand strategy.

Any movement that includes Mearsheimer and Code Pink is by necessity a big tent, and indeed, there are many motivations for restraint. For some, it might be a moral consideration: many libertarians believe that war grows the state, and anti-imperialists want to rein in what they see as an overbearing military-industrial complex. For others, the motivation is financial: although conservative deficit hawks are far less vocal on defense than on other issues, they exist, and many progressives and even some mainstream Democrats view cuts to military spending as an easy way to free up resources for infrastructure or social programs. For others in the restraint community, it is personal: some of the recent activism around ending the war on terrorism has been driven by veterans who are concerned about what the conflict has done to their fellow soldiers and to American society writ large. Then there are the strategists, for whom the pursuit of restraint is largely about avoiding the failures and risks of the current approach. There are even those who might be called “restraint-curious,” people who are open to a more restrained foreign policy on specific issues but reject the broader notion.

The result is a coalition that—much like its opposition—is broad and bipartisan, a partnership of the left and the right in which the two sides don’t agree with each other on much else. Consider the congressional activism around ending U.S. support for the Saudi-led war in Yemen, a movement that was spearheaded by two liberals, Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont and Senator Chris Murphy, a Democrat from Connecticut, and two Republicans, Senators Rand Paul of Kentucky and Mike Lee of Utah. Or consider the strange bedfellows made by the war in Afghanistan. In the House of Representatives, advocates of withdrawal included Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, the standard-bearer of the Democratic Party’s left wing, and Matt Gaetz of Florida, a Republican devotee of Trump. The transpartisan nature of the coalition pushing for restraint is one of its core strengths.